

Interview with Marshal Vassili Sokolovsky in Soviet News (5 October 1948)

Caption: On 5 October 1948, in response to questions from East German journalists, Marshal Vasily Sokolovsky, Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet zone of occupation in Germany, outlines the causes of the Berlin Crisis.

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The situation in Berlin

Marshal Sokolovsky's statement

Correspondents of the ADN agency and the newspapers "Berliner Zeitung," "Tribuene" and "Neues Deutschland," asked Marshal of the Soviet Union Sokolovsky, Chief of the Soviet military administration and Commander-in-Chief of the Soviet Occupation Troops in Germany, some questions on the situation in Berlin in connection with the negotiations of the four Powers which have been taking place in Moscow and Berlin. Marshal Sokolovsky gave the following replies to these questions:—

Question 1. — *Why have the American and British authorities at the present time complicated the settlement of the Berlin question?*

Reply. — We have the impression that the Western Powers are not seeking the solution of the Berlin question, that on this question they continue their aggressive policy, pursuing aims which have nothing in common with the settlement of the situation in Berlin. By complicating the solution of the Berlin question the Western Powers are trying first and foremost to distract public attention from their splitting of Germany and their creation of a West German State. A splinter "Parliamentary Council" for Western Germany has already been set up and a Western German constitution is being rapidly prepared, as also a so-called occupation statute for the Western zones, which is to serve as a substitute for the peace treaty with Germany. The complication of the Berlin question is also being used to harness the reactionary forces inside and outside Germany and to use them as a support in putting through the Marshall plan.

Giving support to the uncertainty and unrest, the Western Powers are exploiting the Berlin question in order to conceal the knocking together of an aggressive Western military bloc directed against the Soviet Union and the countries of new democracy, and to distract the attention of the peoples from the questions of peace and disarmament.

If the three Western Powers were to seek a solution of the Berlin question, loyally taking account of the interests of all four countries, then the negotiations would long ago have brought forth a positive result. However, they are not striving towards a loyal solution; they want to make use of Berlin as an "advance post" for the struggle against democracy and Socialism, as Bevin stated frankly in his last speech in the House of Commons. Berlin is, in point of fact, already being used by the Western Powers as a base for disrupting the economic and political life of the Soviet zone, by means of disorganising the currency and by other aggressive actions which violate the Potsdam Agreement.

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Question 2. — *What, in your opinion, are the reasons for the so-called Berlin crisis?*

Reply. — The most profound reasons for the "crisis" lie in the policy of splitting Germany which the Western Powers are pursuing. If the Western Powers were not pursuing the policy of splitting Germany, there could be neither the Berlin nor any other "crisis" in Germany's affairs. The London Conference of the three Powers in March this year adopted a decision to accomplish the splitting of Germany and to set up a West German State.

When the Soviet Command on March 20 in the Control Council demanded information concerning the secret decisions of the London three-Power conference on the German question, the three Western Commanders refused to give this information to the Control Council. Neither did they give any assurances that the separate decisions of the London Conference did not contradict the Potsdam Agreements and the principles of the quadripartite administration of Germany. These separate decisions of the three Powers on fundamental questions of the destiny of Germany disrupted the Control Council and the quadripartite administration of Germany and, consequently, struck a devastating blow against the quadripartite administration of Berlin, the more so because the Western occupation authorities endeavoured to include the Western sectors of the city in the West German State that they were creating.

The direct cause of the origin of the so-called Berlin crisis was the separate currency reform introduced in Western Germany by the American, British and French occupation authorities on June 18, 1948, and which was a few days afterwards extended to the Western sectors of Berlin. Demands made from the Soviet side for the carrying out of a currency reform for the whole of Germany and the agreements already reached in the Control Council, concerning the basic principles for such an all-German currency reform, were ignored by the Western occupation Powers which undertook a separate currency reform in Western Germany. This was the biggest step taken by the Western occupation authorities along the road of accomplishing the splitting of Germany.

Instead of a single German currency in Germany, two currencies began to circulate. Instead of unified prices there were two sets of prices. The prerequisites for free movement of the population and of commodities between the zones of occupation of Germany were thus delayed. Inter-zonal trade was converted in essence into trading between different States. In actual fact, it petered out. The work of Germany's economic restoration was irrevocably damaged.

The Soviet occupation authorities were compelled to introduce restrictive measures on communications with the Western zones in order to protect the economy of the Soviet zone and Berlin from the influx of the valueless old currency from the Western zones.

Not satisfied with the above-mentioned separate actions in Western Germany, the Western occupation authorities introduced the Western mark with the "B" stamp in their sectors of Berlin also, although clearly the fact that the American, British and French authorities are in Berlin does not give them the right to disorganise currency circulation in Berlin and the Soviet zones of occupation of Germany by the introduction into Berlin of a second currency from the West. The attempts to disorganise the economic life of the Soviet zone by means of "B" marks could not but compel the Soviet authorities to prolong the operation of the protective, restrictive measures in connection with Berlin's communication with the Western zones.

At the conference on June 22, even the Western financial experts declared that they can fully understand the arguments of the Soviet occupation authorities concerning the impossibility of any currency other than that in the Soviet zone being introduced into circulation in Berlin, since Berlin is in the centre of this zone and connected with it by all kinds of economic ties.

The democratic public of Berlin and the Soviet zone also protested resolutely against the introduction of a second currency in Berlin, and in this connection mass meetings and demonstrations of workers took place from June until recent days.

The British and French press also pointed out the pernicious consequences of the introduction of a second currency in Berlin. Thus the British Liberal newspaper *Manchester Guardian*, on June 24, pointed out admonishingly: We must carefully think over whether we are perhaps ourselves complicating our sojourn in Berlin by the introduction of a second currency, making life difficult for the Germans, instead of allowing the Russians control over currency. We must confess that for the Germans far the best thing is what the Russians have been trying to do, i.e., establish a unified currency for the whole of Berlin.

The practical actions of the Western authorities undertaken to undermine and discredit the currency of the Soviet zone of occupation of Germany after the "B" marks were introduced in Berlin, also testify to the aggressive nature of the policy of the Western occupation authorities in Berlin. There was immediately organised on a large scale in the Western sectors of Berlin speculation on the black market in the currency of the Soviet zone and, what is more, a rate of exchange between the two currencies disadvantageous to the currency of the Soviet zone was artificially maintained. For the same purpose of undermining the currency of the Soviet zone the Americans threw on the black market in the Western sectors of Berlin, for sale "only in exchange for 'B' marks," cigarettes, coffee, chocolate and other American goods.

Following the same path, the Western occupation authorities in Berlin on August 5 set up so-called "exchange offices" in the Western sectors for open speculation in currency of the Soviet zone. The

speculative rate of exchange in these exchange offices is arbitrarily fixed by the owners of the offices jointly with representatives of the Western occupation authorities “depending on political considerations.” City Councillor Doctor Haas, Chief of the Financial Department of the Magistrat, was compelled to admit this fact. Profits from speculation with the currency of the Soviet zone in Berlin are used by the Western occupation authorities for paying the occupation and other expenses of the Western authorities in Berlin at the expense of the Soviet zone.

The Western authorities in Berlin have also taken other measures aimed at the disorganisation of currency circulation and at the creation of currency chaos in Berlin, measures which cannot but be reflected in the situation in the Soviet zone. On August 10, 1948, the British, American and French authorities in Berlin issued an order prohibiting all institutions and persons in the Western sectors of the city from transferring money from their accounts to accounts in the Soviet sector as well as from accepting analagous transfers to the Soviet sector. By this order the Western occupation authorities in fact liquidated the free money circulation inside Berlin which led to the disorganisation of the activity of the credit establishments of Berlin. Moreover, the Western occupation authorities gave an order to the Berlin Magistrat for the separate collection of taxes in the Western sectors of Berlin, which liquidated the unity of the city’s budget.

In July and August this year in the Western sectors of the city the occupation authorities issued instructions prohibiting commercial and industrial firms of the Western sectors from maintaining any production or trade relations with firms of the Soviet sector and Soviet occupation zone, which inflicted a blow on Berlin economy as a whole and in the first place on the industry of the Western sectors. The occupation authorities have been compelling German firms in the Western sectors to break trade deals with firms of the Soviet sector, even in cases when the latter were providing enterprises of the Western sectors with necessary coal and raw materials.

All these facts testify that the Western occupation authorities, by introducing a second currency into Berlin, aimed at undermining the currency and disorganising the economy of the Soviet zone, to which the Soviet occupation authorities could under no circumstances agree.

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Question 3. — *What is your attitude to the question of the so-called “blockade” of Berlin? Can the demands of the Western authorities for a preliminary lifting of the “blockade” of Berlin be considered as a prerequisite for negotiations on the Berlin question?*

Reply. — There neither was nor is a blockade of Berlin. If there had been a blockade the Berlin population would have been deprived of the possibility of receiving supplies of foodstuffs, fuel and other essentials. In fact, however, the entire population of Berlin has the full possibility of receiving all supplies due to it, including coal for the winter, from the Soviet sector of Berlin. Only the opposition of the Berlin Magistrat, obedient to the Western occupation authorities, is depriving the Berlin population of the possibility of receiving these supplies directly from the shops in the Western sectors of Berlin.

The costly transportation of food and coal to Berlin from the Western zones by the so-called air lift is thus an unnecessary and purely propagandist measure which only imposes on Germany an unnecessary burden of expenses. It is true that the “air lift” is also used for exporting valuables from Berlin to the Western zones, but this cannot justify its existence.

However, even in the present situation, when the so-called air lift exists between Berlin and the Western zones, Berlin in fact is supplied in the main at the expense of the Soviet zone. According to far from complete data apart from coal, textiles and other commodities, up to 900 tons of products go to the Western sectors of the city daily from the Soviet zone through various channels.

I would like to refute decisively the false statement made recently in the House of Commons that allegedly the Soviet occupation authorities counted on starvation among the Berlin population during the introduction of restrictive measures on communications between Berlin and the Western occupation zones on June 18

this year. By mid-June the Western sectors of Berlin had large stocks of foodstuffs, and there is a great quantity of grain of the Soviet military administration in warehouses in the Western sectors of Berlin. Nevertheless, already at the beginning of July the Soviet Government, on the representations from the Soviet military administration, approved a decision to take upon itself fully the supplying of the entire Berlin population. A hundred thousand tons of grain and 10,800 tons of fats have been supplied by the Soviet Union, which both covered the immediate needs of the German population of Berlin as well as the shortage of fats which arose in the Soviet zone of occupation.

Is it not clear in view of what has been said that the talk about a “starvation blockade” of Berlin is a premeditated slander and a provocative invention?

As regards the supply of the Western sectors of Berlin with coal, electricity and gas, the solution of this question depends exclusively on the elimination of obstacles created by the Western occupation authorities in the way of trading between the industry of the Western sectors of Berlin and the industry of the Soviet zone which is able to provide the necessary fuel and raw materials to the Western sectors of the city. This is how matters stand regarding the false legend about the so-called blockade of Berlin.

As regards the demand of the Western Powers that before a renewal of negotiations on the Berlin question restrictive measures on communications between Berlin and the Western occupation zones should be lifted, this demand represents in itself a glaring proof of the Western Powers’ departure from the four-Power agreement reached in Moscow on the simultaneous lifting of restrictive measures on communications and the withdrawal from circulation in Berlin of the second currency, that is of the “B” mark.

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Question 4. — *Can you say anything on the progress of the Berlin negotiations of the four Commanders-in-Chief?*

Reply. — The negotiations in Berlin of the four Commanders-in-Chief began on August 31 and were broken off on September 7 on the insistence of the American Commander-in-Chief General Clay. At first, commissions of experts on communications, finance and trade were created. During the first meetings the Western experts did not make any concrete proposals, which brought about certain delay in the work of the Commanders-in-Chief.

In view of this, as well as in view of a great number of technical questions, by September 7 the commissions of experts managed to discuss only some of the questions submitted to them. The Commanders-in-Chief needed at least three or four days more in order to complete the consideration of all remaining unagreed questions on trade and finance and to present to the Governments a joint report of the Commanders-in-Chief indicating both agreed and unagreed questions as the Soviet Command insisted. However, the three Western Commanders-in-Chief did not want to present such an agreed report. The American Commander-in-Chief insisted on interruption of the negotiations, which consequently led to the negotiations being broken off.

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Question 5. — *What was the position of the Soviet Commander-in-Chief during the negotiations of the Commanders-in-Chief in Berlin on the question of lifting restrictions on communications between Berlin and the Western zones?*

Reply. — During the progress of negotiations in Berlin the Soviet Commander-in-Chief was striving, in accordance with the directives of the four Governments, to find a satisfactory basis for re-establishing normal communications between Berlin and the Western zones.

On September 7, 1948, the Soviet Command submitted the following proposals:—

(1) All restrictions on railway transport as well as on motor transport imposed on March 30, 1948, to be

abolished;

- (2) Transport of goods and passengers between Berlin and the Western occupation zones of Germany to be made through the Helmstedt-Berlin railway line and on the Helmstedt-Berlin motor road;
- (3) A daily limit of 16 pairs of trains, three of them military, to be established on the Helmstedt-Berlin railway;
- (4) Transport of servicemen, members of their families and civilian employees of the occupation forces, subjects of that country to which the occupation forces belong, to be carried out in military trains and in motor-cars on the motor road; these servicemen, members of their families, and civilian personnel of these occupation forces to be in possession of identity cards. German personnel in the service of the occupation authorities to travel between the zones in normal passenger trains. The latter cannot enjoy the use of military trains of the allied occupation authorities. Military freight of the occupation forces to be transported in military trains and the right of transit of these goods given in the way-bill presented at the traffic control point by the chief of the corresponding military train;
- (5) Food and coal arriving for the supply of the Berlin population, transported on the Helmstedt-Berlin railway, to be subject to checking at the traffic control point on the presentation of way-bills; commercial goods to be checked on the presentation of licences;
- (6) A bilateral guard for checking military trains to be established at exit and entry to stations and with regard to motor transport also on the motor road in the region of the zonal frontier and in the region of Berlin;
- (7) The four occupation authorities to issue orders prohibiting transport of currency, Western marks and Eastern marks, in trains, motor-vehicles and planes;
- (8) Air communication with Berlin for the needs of occupation troops of the Western Powers to be carried out on the basis of the decision of the Control Council of November 30, 1945;
- (9) All railway lines and waterways both from the West to the East as well as from the East to the West to be used for inter-zonal trade and international communications.

The proposals of the Soviet Union regarding communications fully restore normal conditions for supplying Berlin with food, fuel and other goods. They do not worsen, either as regards number of trains or road transport, the supply of the Western sectors of Berlin as previously established in the organs of the Control Council. Moreover, for the transport of goods to and from Berlin 16 pairs of trains daily, as proposed by the Soviet Command, have never been required in the past. The proposals of the Soviet Command on abolition of restrictions on communications were recognised by the Western Commanders-in-Chief as important and as considerably advancing the negotiations as a whole.

Nevertheless, the Commanders-in-Chief of the Western zones were apparently not at all disposed to accept the Soviet proposals, although these proposals took into consideration all the main requirements of the Western occupation authorities; they concentrated their attention only on point 8 on air communications, using it as an artificial reason for refusal to discuss and approve the Soviet proposals on communications between Berlin and the Western zones.

They tried to eliminate from discussion the question of air traffic as if this question were entirely within their own competence. I have to stress that in regard to air corridors between Berlin and the Western zones, already on November 30, 1945, the Control Council approved a decision which provided that air traffic between Berlin and the Western zones should be carried out for the needs of the occupation troops of the Western Powers in Berlin. The Soviet Command in Berlin proposed that we should be guided by this decision alone, and should not make any changes in it.

In any case it is clear that with the existence of the two separate currencies in the Western and Eastern parts of Germany, control of the Soviet organs should be established over all traffic of goods, including air traffic, which is a necessary measure protecting the currency of the Soviet zone from the illegal traffic and contraband.

It is necessary to point out that the Western Commanders-in-Chief, on receiving the Soviet proposal on the question of communications, did not on their part make any equally definite statements that immediate measures would be taken by them for the restoration of communications, broken off by them, between the Soviet zone and Western zones as well as for transit communications between the Soviet zone and other countries passing through the Western zones.

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Question 6. — *What was the position of the Soviet Command in the Berlin negotiations on the question of the introduction in Berlin of the currency of the Soviet zone and the withdrawal of the “B” mark?*

Reply. — The instructions received by the Commanders-in-Chief provide for the German mark of the Soviet zone being the only currency for Berlin and for the Western “B” mark being withdrawn from circulation in Berlin simultaneously with the lifting of restrictions on the traffic with the Western zones. The four Commanders-in-Chief were instructed to work out concrete measures for the introduction in Berlin of the German mark of the Soviet zone.

These measures should ensure:—

“(a) The absence of discrimination or of actions directed against the holders of Western marks in connection with the exchange of these Western ‘B’ marks issued in Berlin. These ‘B’ marks shall be accepted in exchange for German marks of the Soviet zone at the rate of one to one;

“(b) Equal conditions as regards currency and the provision of fully available banking and credit facilities in all sectors of Berlin. The four Commanders-in-Chief are instructed to provide sufficient guarantees with a view to averting a situation where the utilisation in Berlin of the German mark of the Soviet zone leads to disorganisation of the currency circulation or to violation of the stability of the currency in the Soviet zone of occupation;

“(c) A satisfactory basis for trade between Berlin and other countries and the Western zones of Germany. Changes in this agreed basis shall only be carried through by agreement between the four Commanders-in-Chief;

“(d) Provision of a sufficient quantity of currency for budget purposes and for occupation expenditures that have been reduced to the maximum extent, and also the balancing of the Berlin Budget. The regulation of money circulation in Berlin is to be effected by the German Emission Bank of the Soviet zone through the credit institutions of Berlin now in operation. To ensure control over the practical fulfilment of the above-mentioned financial measures connected with the introduction and circulation of a single currency in Berlin, a financial commission is set up of representatives of the four Commanders-in-Chief.”

During the negotiations in Berlin, the Commanders-in-Chief in the main agreed upon the order of exchange of the Western “B” marks issued in Berlin for the German marks of the Soviet occupation zone as well as upon the order of revaluation of current and savings accounts in the credit establishments situated in the Western sectors of Berlin.

The proposal of the Soviet Command on financial questions represented a concrete programme of action also in other spheres, ensuring the carrying out of conditions laid down in the instruction of the four Governments. However, from the stand taken by the Western Commanders-in-Chief it was clear that they wanted to create for themselves such a position in Berlin as would mean in practice the subjection of financial policy and currency circulation both in Berlin and the Soviet zone to their complete control and influence.

On the question of the functions of the financial commission, the British Command submitted a document providing for the financial commission in Berlin being the “supreme financial authority.” Contrary to the directive of the four Governments that the regulation of currency circulation in Berlin should be carried out by the Deutsche Noten Bank the British Command proposed that the Western authorities should work out their own credit policy for the credit establishments of Berlin through the Berlin City Bank and that the Deutsche Noten Bank of the Soviet zone of occupation should carry out its functions under the supervision of the financial commission.

Thus the currency circulation of the Soviet zone also would have been placed in practice under the control of this four-Power Financial Commission, for which there is no grounds whatever, all the more as the currency circulation in the Western occupation zones of Germany is entirely controlled by the military authorities of these zones.

This demand of the Western authorities means in reality the transfer of control over the economic life of the Soviet zone to the Four-Power Financial Commission.

Such interference by the Western occupation authorities in the question of control of the currency circulation is incompatible with the responsibility of the Soviet military administration for the control of currency circulation in the Soviet occupation zone. The nature of the currency circulation demands that guidance of financial policy rests in one hand. The demand for an independent policy for Berlin under conditions of the circulation in Berlin of the currency of the Soviet occupation zone is fraught with great danger for the economic life of the Soviet zone. If as a result of independent instructions of the financial commission inflation became possible, it would unavoidably spread also to the Soviet occupation zone which cannot be permitted by the Soviet occupation authorities.

Meanwhile the British proposals, supported by the American and French Commanders-in-Chief, put forward a direct demand that the Deutsche Noten Bank of the Soviet zone should provide the credit establishments with the bank notes according to their needs — that is in reality in unlimited quantity. This proposal of the Western occupation authorities is in direct contradiction to the instructions of the four Governments according to which the four Commanders-in-Chief are instructed to provide sufficient guarantees to prevent German marks of the Soviet zone used in Berlin from leading to the disorganisation of the currency circulation or the violation of the stability of currency in the Soviet zone of occupation.

Thus the proposal of the Commanders-in-Chief of the Western zones did not reflect their goodwill and desire to take a stand, on the basis of the instructions of the four Governments, acceptable to all four parties. On the contrary, the Commanders-in-Chief of the Western zones have demonstrated the definite aggressiveness of their intentions and their wish to use the financial commission for the disorganisation of the currency circulation and economy of the Soviet zone.

It is clear from this how unfounded are the allegations that the Soviet Command on the question of the introduction in Berlin of the mark of the Soviet zone and on the functions of the four-Power Financial

Commission has deviated from the instructions given to the four Commanders-in-Chief. On the contrary, it was the Commanders-in-Chief of the Western zones who put forward a demand in sharp contradiction to their obligations. Obviously this was done deliberately with the purpose of disrupting the negotiations and thus preventing the agreement reached among the four Governments in Moscow being put into effect.

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Question 7. — *What sort of proposals were made by the Soviet side on the question of Berlin trade with the Western ones and other countries?*

Reply. — During the progress of the Berlin negotiations the Soviet Command strove also in this question to find the most acceptable decision for all parties. It is known to me that on September 25, this year, the Soviet Government in its Note submitted a proposal of a still wider character on this question, making it possible to reach an agreed decision. In this Note the Soviet Government proposed that trade between Berlin and the Western zones and other countries be carried out under licenses for importing and exporting goods on a four-Power basis. This very system was proposed by the American Commander-in-Chief General Clay during the negotiations of the Commanders in-Chief in Berlin.

However, the representatives of the Western Powers for some reason now consider the substantial concession contained in this proposal of the Soviet Government to be illusory and apparently want a system under which, although the currency of the Soviet zone would circulate in Berlin, the Soviet administration would be completely deprived of the possibility to participate in controlling Berlin's trade with the Western zones and other countries. It is completely understandable that, under the present circumstances when there are two different currencies in circulation in Germany, and with the introduction in Berlin and the Soviet zone of a single currency of the Soviet zone, the Soviet administration would bear still greater responsibility for the state of the currency system in Berlin and the Soviet zone, a very important condition of which is the ensuring of normal trade in Berlin.

Under these circumstances to drive the Soviet military administration out of participation in the control of Berlin's trade would mean to open wide channels for all sorts of speculative trade deals of the Western sectors of Berlin, which could inflict irreparable damage both on the economy of the Soviet zone and Berlin, and on currency circulation in the Soviet zone and in Berlin. And the possibility of speculative deals and trade of this sort is demonstrated by the fact that the Economic Department of the Berlin Magistrate is at the present time engaged in consideration of such speculative cases connected with illegal trade even through the "air bridge" with the Western zones, the scope of which amounts meanwhile to 10,000,000 marks.

It is clear from the above that the Soviet side during the negotiations in Berlin proceeded from the necessity of finding a positive basis for solving the questions placed before the Commanders-in-Chief in a spirit of concord and agreement. However, from the very beginning of the negotiations it ran up against a pre-conceived and negative attitude towards its proposals on the part of the other Commanders-in-Chief. Although the commissions of experts created by the Commanders-in-Chief on finance, communications and trade reached a common viewpoint on many questions, the Western Commanders-in-Chief nevertheless did not consider it possible to complete the work that had been started, and in general the progress of the negotiations showed that the Commanders-in-Chief of the Western occupation zones had apparently approached the negotiations with the previously established purpose of rejecting all proposals of the Soviet side. Such ill-disposed tactics could be observed throughout the progress of the negotiations.

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Question 8. — *What are the prospects of solving the "Berlin crisis"?*

Reply. — The Soviet Government on September 25 already declared to the Western Powers that it was prepared to conduct further negotiations on the question of Berlin on the basis of the agreement reached on August 30 in Moscow. Thus the achievement of agreement on the Berlin question on a practical basis, taking mutual interests into account, depends entirely on the wish of the Governments of the United States,

Great Britain and France. Attempts to achieve solution of this question by other means are obviously calculated only to drag out the situation created in Berlin, which cannot lead to those results which the Western occupation authorities expect.